RACISM IN THEOLOGY

THEOLOGY AGAINST RACISM

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RACISM IN THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGY AGAINST RACISM

REPORT OF A CONSULTATION
organized by
THE COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER
AND THE PROGRAMME TO COMBAT RACISM

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, GENEVA, 1975

PREFACE

No other programme of the World Council of Churches has stirred up so much discussion as the Programme to Combat Racism. Because of the controversial nature of this programme, the ecumenical movement in these last six years has been wrestling with fundamental issues, feared by some, welcomed by others. It would be true to say that the discussions have centred largely on the Special Fund without taking into account the many other aspects which form the body of the Programme. For example, in 1975 it initiated sixteen programme projects which aim at helping the churches to understand the deep roots of racism. "Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism" is one of these projects.

Other theological debates and discussions on racism have been carried on within the ecumenical movement of course. Aware of these often heated theological discussions, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches recommended in Berlin in 1974 that Faith and Order should assume responsibility for co-ordinating the debate. At its meeting in Accra in 1974 the Commission on Faith and Order had already expressed its intention of collaborating closely with the Programme to Combat Racism.

The present report is the outcome of a consultation jointly organized by these two departments of the World Council of Churches. Further work is needed on this wide-ranging theme many facets and problems of which we have not yet been able to deal with adequately. We hope that you will share with us your comments and insights. Above all, we trust that you will engage others in this vital discussion so that we may all deepen our understanding of theology. It is hoped that this report will contribute to and reinforce our commitment to the struggle against racism.

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INTRODUCTION

From September 14 - 20, a consultation was held in Geneva to consider the theme "Racism in Theology and Theology Against Racism". The meeting was organized jointly by the Commission on Faith and Order and the Programme to Combat Racism. This consultation attempted to respond to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches which, at its meeting in Berlin in 1974, called for further theological reflection on problems connected with the struggle of the ecumenical movement against racism. But we, the participants of the consultation, were also keen to set our work in the wider context of discussions, criticisms and questions which have arisen in many member churches of the World Council of Churches, in groups and congregations throughout the world.

Before setting out the results of our reflections, we would want briefly to describe the situation out of which we speak. Although we come from different parts of the world, we are aware of how deeply we are involved in the all-pervasive and contaminating force of racism. We find ourselves sharing the same perplexities and agonies and we realize that whatever theological contribution we can render to the common task of combatting racism will have to be read against our already existing involvement with all the failures and errors which it implies. Although we affirm the necessity of involving the Christian conscience in a prophetic way, we are mindful of the fact that we are tackling issues which have a pastoral dimension of considerable importance.

We are agreed not to focus our theological attention narrowly on the Programme to Combat Racism and its activities during the last six years. Our task is not to give a justification for what it has achieved or an apologetic rationale for its emphases of action.

We consider it our task to approach racism in a wider sense and to look not only at the most blatant manifestations of entrenched racism in our time, but to search for its roots, its causes and implications in order to discover more fully the changes which must take place within the churches. Racism is one of the most ugly features of the economic, monetary and political structures which give the growing interdependence of humankind its destructive and oppressive shape. The ways, for instance, in which migrant workers in Western Europe are misused and exploited, the prejudices and discrimination which immigrant and other ethnic minority groups face in many countries are closely intertwined with the forces which sustain and reinforce racist oppression in other parts of the world, notably in Southern Africa. There is no need here to describe in detail this interrelationship of racism, exploitation and worldwide economic disorder. We refer to the

manifold analyses worked out by the Programme to Combat Racism and other ecumenical agencies, both international and national. (1) But to mention this implies that our theological deliberations must be ecumenical and inclusive by relating both to the local and national situations and the worldwide network of injustice and suffering.

It should be noted that by focussing attention on racism we do not overlook the plight in which Christians find themselves as they struggle for liberation from economic and political oppression and injustice in many parts of the world where racist elements feature less prominently. We are also aware of other forms of discrimination and injustice which persist in our time, for instance in socialist countries dominated by Marxist ideologies, where religious groups, ethnic minorities and refugees are under great strain and hardship. We recognize also the widespread discrimination against women in most nations of the world.

In pointing to all these elements of intense suffering we see all the more clearly how deeply this is ingrained in our lives as Christians and as churches and how often we have lacked prophetic clarity and moral integrity in denouncing these evils and summoning our power to act against them.

Yet, in our listening to God's word, we are assured of the promise that in Jesus Christ the principalities and powers of this world have been dethroned. In seeking to enter more fully into the discipleship of Jesus Christ, we discover the courage and indeed the command to do and to live out our theology against racism. It is in this way that we put forth the reflections and recommendations which follow in this report.

CHAPTER I: THE UBIQUITY OF RACISM

1. The Heritage from History

Racism pervades our world today. Racial notions, prejudices and fears are deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of human beings. In order to assess the full weight of these phenomena a brief look at the historical dimensions of racism is necessary. The history

(1) See for instance:

E. Adler: A Small Beginning, An Assessment of the First Five Years of the Programme to Combat Racism, Appendix V; Publications on Racism, Geneva 1974, pp. 96-97.

Y. Kitazawa: From Tokyo to Johannesburg, A Study of Japan's Growing Economic Links with the Republic of South Africa Geneva (WCC), 1975
Business as Usual, International Banking in South Africa CIS Anti-Report (WCC) Geneva.

R. van Waesberge: Do We Participate in Apartheid? Reflections by Black South Africans on Themselves, Us and Our Investments, WCC, Geneva 1975

Richard D.N. Dickinson: To Set At Liberty The Oppressed. Towards An Understanding of Christian Responsibilities for Development/Liberation, WCC, Geneva 1975.

of racism in modern times begins with the African slave trade of the 16th and 17th centuries and the systematic extermination of the aboriginal people of the New World which accompanied it. At one period or another almost every nation in Europe profited from the traffic in African slaves and in North America chattel slavery became a basic institution of a powerful Protestant Christian society.

Following the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade in the 19th century the nations of Europe divided up Africa among themselves and by subterfuge and military conquest colonized the people and proceeded to exploit their land and labour to benefit the metropolitan centers of Europe. The people of India, Indonesia and South-Eastern Asia were similarly dominated and exploited for European and American markets in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In order to justify this massive expropriation of the wealth of black, brown and yellow people, the myth of the superiority of the white race was used, sometimes explicitly, sometimes as a tacit presupposition. According to this myth the darker races of the world were held to be sub-human or innately inferior to all white people. They were divinely ordained to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the Christian nations of Europe and America.

White skin colour, therefore, became the accepted standard of human beauty and all people were judged to be worthy of respect, civil rights and dignity in accordance with the affinity of their complexion to that standard. Even the oppressed peoples themselves accepted this standard and stratified their communities along colour lines.

The consequence of this development, which climaxed in Europe and America in the 19th century continues to affect the whole world. White racism and its consequences is ubiquitous. But its deepest and most harmful penetration is in Western Europe, the United States and Southern Africa. Almost every aspect of civilization - science, religion, law, economics, politics, etiquette and art - have been infected with white racism. All the institutions of western culture, including the church, are inheritors of the racism which flourished for more than 300 years in Europe and America and continues today in many manifest and latent forms.

2. The Pervasiveness of Racism

In summing up these reflections we would say:

Racism is present whenever persons, even before they are born, because of their race, are assigned to a group severely limited in their freedom of movement, their choice of work, their places of residence and so on.

Racism is present whenever groups of people, because of their race, are denied effective participation in the political process, and so are compelled (often by force) to obey the edicts of governments which they were allowed to have no part in choosing.

Racism is present whenever racial groups within a nation are excluded from the normal channels available for gaining economic power, through denial of educational opportunities and entry into occupational groups.

Racism is present whenever the policies of a nation-state ensure benefits for that nation from the labour of racial groups (migrant or otherwise), while at the same time denying to such groups commensurate participation in the affairs of the nation-state.

Racism is present whenever the identity of persons is denigrated through stereotyping of racial and ethnic groups in text books, cinema, mass media, interpersonal relations and other ways.

Racism is present whenever people are denied equal protection of the law, because of race, and when constituted authorities of the state use their powers to protect the interests of the dominant group at the expense of the powerless.

Racism is present whenever groups or nations continue to profit from regional and global structures that are historically related to racist presuppositions and actions.

3. Stages of Ecumenical Involvement in Combating Racism

3.1 Unambiguous Statements

The rise of the ecumenical movement coincided with, and influenced, world-wide efforts to struggle against racism and white racism in particular. As early as 1924 J.H. Oldham challenged the churches to end the vicious circles of injustice and racial discrimination (2). Since then, but mainly after World War II, there have been many unambiguous statements which condemn racism as a denial of Christian faith and as incompatible with the Gospel. Between 1925 and 1968 some 30 statements of this kind were made by ecumenical gatherings and hundreds more have been made by many different churches. If racism could be eradicated by passing church resolutions it would have disappeared long ago. Yet in spite of all these statements and the substantial agreement among the churches which they represent, racism remains as deeply entrenched as ever.

At the Fourth Assembly in Uppsala 1968 the World Council of Churches was challenged to take the step beyond the resolutions and to make way for an action-oriented programme which, by its emphasis on projects and financial assistance, would underline the churches' commitment to combat racism.

3.2 Agreement in Theory and Dissensus in Practice

We thankfully recognize that the PCR has acted as an effective catalyst by bringing out into the open the considerable tension which exists between these theological agreements on the one side and the far-reaching disagreements about their practical application on the other. The factual disagreement, therefore, calls into question the validity and value of the theoretical agreement. How valid is theological work if it fails to incorporate the aspect of action in its reflection processes? How, then, do we do theology? Without undue simplification we would say that the kind of theology which prevailed, and still prevails in the West has a tendency to remain theoretical, academic, and a-political. It shrinks away from taking seriously its personal, social, political and economic implications.

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(2) Christianity and the Race problem, SCM Press, London 1924.

Yet it is impossible to separate Christian reflection from Christian praxis. We need to become more aware of the basic relation that exists between reflection and action, so that both can benefit by this awareness. A cleavage between these two invalidates both sides. Reflection without appropriate action is in danger of becoming erroneous, and action without appropriate thinking runs the risk of becoming false or futile.

3.3 The Involvement of Church and Theology

As the churches began to discover the real breadth and depth of the evil of racism and the close relation between reflection and praxis, the involvement of church and theology became more and more apparent. Western theology, not least during the last two centuries, has been deeply imbedded in Western culture. It has been shaped by the claims and assumptions of the superiority of white people over against other races and it has in turn influenced and undergirded some of these assumptions. However, as we learn to listen to the experience of oppressed and suffering people we begin to see in a new way the shortcomings and the, for the most part unconscious, racist implications in the manner in which theology has been done traditionally. We feel that, perhaps to a differing degree, the great traditions of Orthodox churches share in the same predicament. Therefore, as all our theological approaches have to become more ecumenical, we also see the great task of reevaluating and rethinking theological notions. In order to explain what we have in mind we offer the following brief examples:

A. The concepts of the "People of God" and the notions of election and pre-destination which are closely linked to them have been used to justify the expansionism and privileges of the white races. The migration of white people into North America or Africa have been associated with the migration of the people of Israel into their promised land. By virtue of such a typological identification the people already living in these lands were supposed to be the new Canaanites who were divinely condemned to subjection and servitude by white Christians.

B. This concept was further undergirded by a certain literal understanding of some Biblical ideas - the Hamitic hypothesis, for instance, which was used to read back the basic inequality of the human races into the stories of Genesis and the Ur-Geschichte (Gen 1-12). A static understanding of Creation made it possible to regard this assumed inequality as something given, as a natural law. The eschatological aspect of the belief that women and men are created in God's image in order to become truly human, has been lost.

C. The understanding of Jesus of Nazareth has been strongly influenced by the image of the Western man. Accordingly, in artistic depictions of Jesus and in assumptions about his personality and behaviour much has been read into the New Testament that was derived from European and American culture. He became the white Jesus, alien and unrecognizable for the peoples in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

D. The understanding of the Bible has been distorted by the heavy emphasis on the individual person and his/her spiritual needs. This led to the development of Christianity as a private religion. The movements of awakening and conversion focussed largely on the individual person and the eternal salvation of his or her soul. The

Church became the assembly of reconciled individuals. Consequently the ethical teaching underlined the individual righteousness and became largely concerned with personal ethics. The corporateness of the Christian community and its common witness and service as the salt and leaven of this world receded into the background. Accordingly there developed and inability to see and to deal with the structural and institutional elements of the life of the churches.

3.4 The Unconscious Roots of Racism

Yet the roots of racism are still deeper. Even when these and other implicitly racist concepts in theology are no longer explicitly promoted or defended they remain in the minds of many Christian people as unspoken, perhaps unrecognized, assumptions. They therefore continue to operate on the sub-conscious level and help to confirm racial prejudices. In this area of the sub-conscious the insights of depth psychology prove valuable in enabling us to understand the psychological mechanisms of racism. Our fears of the unknown, our guilt, shame, anger etc. are suppressed into the unconscious, what some would call the dark shadow of our conscious existence. As a result we project our guilt and fear, both individually and collectively, on to other human beings or groups. The dark races in particular have often become the scape-goats of unacknowledged and repressed fears of white societies. As a result of all this racism was able to become a normal and usually unnoticed element not only in the behaviour but also in the beliefs of Christians. It appears that the help of depth psychology should be sought more widely not only to understand but to heal the situation in which both oppressors and oppressed find themselves today.

4. Conclusion

Incomplete though it is, our description of some of the more obvious features of racism gives some idea of how far-reaching the problem of racism is. Its causes are complex, since they are to be found in all areas of life, not least in our personal histories. In racism we are confronted with a powerful force which induces a profound sense of perplexity, hopelessness and even despair in many people. How can we be set free to renew our struggle against the evil of racism?

CHAPTER II: CHRISTIAN WITNESS AGAINST RACISM: COLLECTIVE REPENTANCE IN CORPORATE ACTION AND REFLECTION

1. The Gospel of Forgiveness and the Confession of Collective Sin

Some of us hold that it will only be possible to sustain the fight against racism if we start with the Gospel of grace and forgiveness. Our faith is in Jesus Christ who suffered on the Cross and through the Cross won the victory. He is the victorious victim. Out of the depth of his suffering he is the Lord of history, a history undercutting the histories of demonic oppression and of the evil revolt against God.

It is in this story that forgiveness and grace are always available and that new beginnings can be made. The witness of the foregoing grace in Jesus Christ must be the starting-point. Others are convinced that to begin with the Gospel of grace would leave us with the danger of belittling the sin of racism. The first emphasis ought to be on confession. The Gospel of grace comes to those who truly repent. We must be aware of the fact that the word forgiveness can and has been used in an all too easy way: both asking and offering forgiveness can become an escape from the task of facing the depth of sin and the need for renewing action. There has been much cheap preaching of forgiveness which makes the term almost unbearable for many who have suffered from racist persecution.

We would affirm that it is essential to link both the Gospel of grace and the confession of sin very closely together. Because of the costly grace of Christ we are enabled to confess that racism is a sin which separates us from God and from our fellow human beings. Without it racism could be regarded as a disastrous fate which leaves us with despair or apathy.

We are obliged to confess that racism is a sin not only of individual Christians, but of churches and societies at large. To see the ubiquity of racism makes it mandatory to say that churches and peoples have become guilty of this sin.

The term 'collective sin' is appropriate because it indicates that racism has so permeated the churches and the societies in which they are set that it has become part of the structure of ordinary life. People have become accustomed to patterns of neglect of and contempt for others, of injustice and prejudice, of degradation and exploitation and, now regard them as 'normal'. In the same way, churches have come to take for granted separations along lines of colour, to accept as 'given' the divisions and barriers between people of different races. This demonic pervasiveness of racism compels us to speak of collective sin. 'None is righteous, no not one' (Rom. 3:10). We are thrown together in a solidarity of sin. We are not free to dissociate ourselves self-righteously from this evil.

2. Corporate Repentance-Action

But even when we speak of collective sin with its evil ramifications, we are still within the sphere of Christ's sovereignty. Christ makes us free to repent. And we need indeed to repent. We dare not brand racism as sin without at once responding to it with real and practical penitence.

This response involves repentance both at the individual level and at the corporate level, and repentance commits us to action. The two elements are intimately connected, which is why we prefer to speak of repentance-action or penitent action. But what is the appropriate action?

Some, we know, define repentance in terms of compensatory action. We hesitate to adopt this solution, however, mainly because no material compensation could possibly repair all the immeasurable harm done in the past. To call for compensation in this sense would only be to belittle the suffering which has been caused. There is also the danger that such compensation would lead groups in the Third World to perpetuate

their dependence on white churches. Moreover, compensatory action leads us to look backwards whereas repentance, we are convinced, moves forward, and is concerned not to restore the past but to seek a new and more just future. We have tried, therefore, to establish certain criteria for a forward looking active repentance which would do more justice to the still more radical imperatives of the Gospel.

a) Ideally the action should not be unilateral but decided by both parties, oppressors and oppressed, together.

b) It should open up the possibility of real community in the future.

c) It should be related to the wider area of racism in the secular and political field.

d) Adherence to these criteria will be costly.

This means that repentance-action must be part of a deliberate effort to achieve a new kind of community, an effort which will call for radical changes not only in the administrative structures of the churches but also in society.

The political and economic implications will need to be spelt out and realistically faced, since privileged groups will inevitably have to forego some of their privileges.

In suggesting this idea of repentance-action, it is not supposed that such measures will eliminate all racist sins in the future. That is not within our power. What we envisage is action which can point effectively both to the reality of the sin we repent of and the new life we believe in. Repentance-action of this kind will not be unambiguous nor safe from misinterpretation. We could wish it were otherwise but the sad fact is that all our actions will inevitably bear the mark of the histories and structures in which we live and will therefore still sometimes have racist elements. There will always be a risk of making ourselves vulnerable on all sides.

3. The Church: Regrouping around Suffering

Discovering the sin of racism with all its implications and choosing the risky road of repentance-action, these are two aspects of one and the same process. It is a process which involves individuals and groups in the whole of their life and challenges their entire pattern of behaviour. But it is also a process which involves and challenges the Church of Christ in a preeminent way since there the message of forgiveness is spelt out and articulated as explicitly as possible. In this process we are driven to rethink our ideas as to the nature of the Church and to recover the meaning and implications of its original mission.

We have tried to set out some criteria for 'repentance-action'. Basically, these criteria reflect an attempt to find a new understanding and new forms of discipleship, but not simply in view of the need to combat racism. It is a more radical challenge than that which confronts the churches. We have to go back to the roots and try to restate the real meaning of discipleship. The criteria we found all point to one thing,

namely, the need to re-establish community in situations where there is suffering. This should be our starting point for redefining discipleship.

In many churches and groups around the world, people are experiencing today this process of redefinition and although much still remains obscure here, this experience provides us with our main clue. The link between our knowledge of Jesus Christ, victorious as victim and regnant as suffering servant on the one hand and our understanding and experience of racism on the other is such that 'suffering' is the concrete reference point for the Church. The issue of racism gives renewed force to the words of Jesus:'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's shall save it' (Mark 8.35).

Seen in this light, discipleship could mean the Church's constant effort to regroup and reconstitute itself in situations of real suffering, where suffering is the deepest expression of the struggle for human freedom and reconciliation. Without this constant effort, all declarations of faith, even anti-racist ones, are empty words, and even our active repentance remains arbitrary and haphazard.

In saying such things, none of us has any right to sit in judgement on others. Of that we are painfully aware. We also realize the difficulty of asserting that the Church is defective so long as it evades the radical significance of actual suffering for its own self-understanding and self-expression. Yet we are driven to assert this. Not to do so would be to close our eyes to the real implications of the Gospel and to the real dimensions of our situation. The cost of discipleship is high and each church has to reckon with this at every level of its life.

CHAPTER III: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM AND THE SEARCH FOR A JUST SOCIETY

The pervasiveness of racism and our recognition of the need for active corporate repentance compel us to consider the implications for our life in society in the widest sense. There follow some reflections on issues which confront us in this connection.

1. The Interdependence of Oppression and the Omnipresence of Suffering

Society exists where a group of people are capable of acting together to achieve a common goal. The capacity to act together depends on an effective degree of moral consensus about values, rules and social goals.

A racist society exists because there is sufficient consensus based on racist presuppositions. This consensus may be codified in systems of positive laws and regulations or manifested in customary practices and patterns of behaviour. Institutional racism is the structural aspect of our collective sin.

Racism is not only a matter of personal relations. It also pervades the structures of society. In fact, most of us are born into racist societies. To the extent that there are coercive elements in all social institutions, racist social structures tend to reinforce racist attitudes and practices on the part of the individual members of such societies. Both oppressors and the oppressed are affected by these structures, sometimes with opposite and sometimes with similar consequences. For these reasons, it is necessary to deal directly with institutional racism.

Institutional racism takes different forms today. There are societies where racism is openly institutionalized and legalized. Legal measures support the separation of races and, even worse, the domination and exploitation of one race by another. In some cases racist theories or ideologies are used to justify legal measures of this kind (e.g. apartheid in South Africa); in other countries the racist element in legislation is much more hidden. In theory, equality between races is affirmed but in practice certain legal measures support the privileges of one race over the others (e.g. access to political power, lack of equality in educational opportunities, etc.). The struggle against racism must take account of all these forms of institutional racism. To limit the struggle to the personal realm would be unrealistic. It would fail to take into account the holistic aspect of human existence. In many cases, the first step in the struggle against institutional racism consists in making society aware of the racism operating in its structures.

But involvement in racism is not restricted to overtly racist societies. The Programme to Combat Racism has led to growing awareness of the presence of racism in international relationships. The growth of technology has led to an increasing economic and political interdependence between the various national societies today. Political alliances and economic involvements can therefore reinforce racist systems. Even more, the industrial and economic development of rich countries is based to a large extent on the exploitation of other countries, especially through inequitable profit-making in the exchange of commodities and the use of cheap labour available in Third World countries. The struggle against racism implies a radical analysis of the international economic order. The Christian conscience is faced with a new task. So far, Christian social and political responsibility has been primarily understood as a responsibility within each country. But we live in an era and in a world-community where oppressive forces are interdependent and suffering and exploitation are omnipresent. So there is need to rethink Christian responsibility in the wider context of the world community.

The following considerations are meant as indications of problems which deserve the attention and expertise of a much larger group. We put them here not least to show our readiness to engage in such collaborative efforts in which representatives of many disciplines would need to join. No single approach will suffice. In fact, it may be argued that because of the absence of efficient interdisciplinary collaboration, each science, social, political, economic and otherwise, is rapidly arriving at the frustrating limits of its potential really to suggest viable and just solutions for humanity.

2. What Kind of Community?

The reflection on the political and social dimensions of racism raises the question of the kind of society a Christian needs to work for. There is no agreed theoretical answer to this question. Christian conscience starts from solidarity with the victims of oppression and injustice. It seeks to overcome obstacles to full participation in decision-making and to the just sharing of the resources available to society. The primary Christian concern is not to develop a general theory of society and the shape it should take in the future. Its primary concern is with people suffering in structures of injustice. But this struggle cannot ignore the ideologies and economic systems which operate in today's world. In fact, Christians in their struggle for justice often find themselves in ideological camps and their efforts are often suspected of being ideologically inspired. It is therefore important to clarify the relationship between faith and ideologies. For instance, there is no doubt that a thorough analysis of racism in economic and political relations must often employ Marxist concepts. For instance, the Marxist analysis of class-struggle proves helpful in understanding more fully the connexion between economic exploitation and racism. Christian conscience must feel free to make use of such concepts in its struggle against injustice. Two dangers must be avoided at this point:

a) Anti-Marxism is often used to paralyse discussion of the struggles against structures of injustice in order to disqualify the exercise of political and social responsibilities. Anti-Marxism is often used as a convenient weapon; Christian conscience needs to overcome such ideological "short-cuts."

b) The use of Marxist concepts does not imply the acceptance of Marxism as a system. Marxist systems have in practice sometimes led to new forms of oppression which also need to be denounced as such. In fact, the increasing convergence of Christian and Marxist positions makes it all the more necessary to criticize openly and consistently the inherent dangers of new oppression, inherent in Marxist ideological system.

3. The Struggle for Justice and the Problem of Power

The recognition that racism is not exclusively due to personal attitudes but even more to institutional factors inevitably raises the question of power. To a large extent, injustice prevails because of inequities in the distribution of power. Power in this context means not only power to exercise control over decisions affecting ourselves but the capacity to make decisions affecting others. Those who are advantaged by existing social arrangements enjoy more than their just share of power and so of privileges too; this inequity of power enables them to exercise control over the less powerful. The struggle for justice requires a re-ordering of society. Justice can exist only where power is more equitably distributed.

Christians tend to disregard the importance of power in politics. They often oppose spiritual power to political power and tend to consider political power as evil. There is no doubt that an ultimate distinction is to be made. God's power is manifested in the Cross and

the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; all human power is under the judgement (Krisis) of Jesus Christ. The Christian message always implies an element of criticism of human power. The encounter between Jesus Christ and Pilate remains a model of the relationship between the ultimate spiritual power and the power of politics. But the function of political power is also to make society viable and therefore Christians have a responsibility to work towards an appropriate distribution of power in the political field.

Violence, too, is an aspect of power and is potentially present in all forms of social organization. It manifests itself in the legitimate use of the police power of the state as well as in its illegitimate use, when the powerless are brutalized by it.

Power is in principle a characteristic of all social groups and is both necessary and to be affirmed. It is a basis of both individual and collective freedom and the source of one's capacity to be a contributing member of society. To be denied power is to be denied the right to be human.

We are faced with overwhelming evidence from multiracial societies throughout the world that being black or white results in significantly different levels of access to and participation in education, employment, housing, health and all the other amenities society has to offer. Power, in short, resides overwhelmingly with the white members of these societies.

We are called to break with these traditional structures of racism and to develop new structures in church and society which will eliminate injustices based on race. One important way to develop new structures is to provide resources of power to those who are now powerless so that they will be less vulnerable to the perpetrators of injustices. However, as Reinhold Niebuhr observed many years ago, power is never willingly given up by those who possess it, that it is often necessary to use coercion if the powerless are ever to achieve a greater measure of justice.

Since racists in the contemporary world are not willing to give up the power which they wield, those who are oppressed by racism are often forced by the circumstances in which they are placed to rise against their oppressors and to use force to achieve their own liberation. The means by which they have sought to acquire the resources of power have been necessitated by the nature of the particular racial context. Any assessment of the use of violence or non-violence, therefore must be related to the particular situation of the victims of injustice. Non-violence in some situations has been a strategy which has worked effectively in favour of the victimized; in other situations, violence has proved to be the only workable strategy.

The experience of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States provides an example of how black Americans were able to organize themselves to eliminate the legal support to racism which long prevailed in American society. Through non-violent direct action based on the Christian principle of love the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his associates organized an effective strategy for social change which is instructive

for both church and society. However, just as the forces of racism tried to resist the inevitable movement for change, more recent developments in the struggle for racial justice have made clear that violence may in fact occur, and as Christians we need to face this issue responsibly and with candour.

In Mozambique, the refusal of the Portuguese to recognize the right of Africans to justice led to the uprising of the latter, organized in FRELIMO. This uprising came only after non-violent strategies had been tried and frustrated for many years. The strategy developed by FRELIMO was initiated only as a final desperate response to the many long years of greater violence endured by the Africans, and it must be appreciated in this context. The response on the part of the victims against injustice was determined by the context in which they were placed by those who held the resources of power.

4. Violence and Non-Violence

We have stated above that violence is an aspect of the coercive nature of all forms of social organization. Our preoccupation with the problem of violence must not obscure our fundamental commitment to work for justice and the liberation of people from racist oppression. We must recognize that violence is pervasive in the context of racism throughout the world.

Violence must be recognized in all the forms of suffering endured by the victims of racism and in the dehumanizing consequences of discrimination and segregation. To deny a person the right to work in order to sustain his or her life or to shorten a person's life through malnutrition or the denial of proper health and medical care are as violently destructive of human life and personality as are the more overt acts of violence directed against racial groups.

Racist oppressors are often more diligent in their criticism of the violence sometimes committed by the victims of oppression in their struggle to achieve justice than they are critical of the persistent and systemic forms of violence which are present in their racist societies.

We also share in particular the agony of Christian pacifists who are caught between their commitment to non-violent action as the strategy for overcoming racial injustice and the element of violence in concrete movements for human liberation. As Christians, we must reject all forms of violence and re-affirm the principle of direct non-violent action as the way to bring an end to recalcitrant racist structures. Having said this, however, we are also called to stand firmly on the side of the oppressed, even though violence may at times be present, for our goal is to achieve a more just society in which such desperate acts of violence on the part of the oppressed will no longer be necessary.

CHAPTER IV: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH: DISCIPLESHIP AND DISCIPLINED LIFE

We now turn to a few reflections on the role of the Church itself. In the second chapter we tried to describe what the church ought to be, i.e. a community of disciples which constantly regroups and reconstitutes itself around situations of suffering. What are the consequences of discipleship in terms of "disciplined life"?

I. The Legacy of the Suffering Church in Past and Present

The evil of racism discloses in a new way how often the churches fail to centre around the suffering, dispossessed and degraded members of humanity. The churches are constantly yielding to the temptation to forget those who are forgotten and not to heed the voice of the voiceless. They seek to organize and establish themselves along the lines of the main values and dominant forces in their respective societies. In varying degrees the histories of our churches bear witness to their constant drifting away from the poor and powerless to the rich and mighty. The persecutions of defenceless minorities, the ghettoes of Jews in Europe and the recurrent pogroms, the endless stream of refugees, who for the sake of their faith have had to leave their homes and lands - all these have through many centuries left a stain on the history of Christianity. This means that most of our 'official' established churches, because of their history and the way their structures have developed, are not equiped to deal with this suffering. There have, of course, been movements within the churches which have had certain insights so radical and onesided that the established, official church at the time has found them threatening. But these movements have often been branded 'heretical' or 'sectarian'. Consequently they have suffered appallingly at the hands of the official Church and of the political authorities in the particular country with which the official Church had aligned itself. Yet it is in many of these expelled groups that the witness of enduring hope in the midst of so much suffering has been kept alive. This presents us with the duty of rescuing this legacy of suffering and resistance, of revolt and silent endurance, hidden in the history of the oppressed. This would give us a truer understanding of what is today being expressed in the theologies of black people, notably in North America and Southern Africa. At the same time, it will help us to a deeper understanding of what it means to die to the might and power of this world and to rise again on the side of suffering. As the churches reflect the ministry of Jesus Christ who 'reigns from the Tree', they will regain their authentic ministry. Called constantly to meditate on the cross and resurrection, they will be reminded that their Lord died on the cross because of the combined efforts of an alliance of established religion and power politics. They will need to be constantly on guard against the recurring danger of concluding similar alliances, and become again and again the Church of the suffering servant.

2. Racism - A'Moral heresy'?

We have tried to reflect on the Church's role with the self-searching that this requires. The sin of racism is so all-pervasive that we are not at liberty to judge or condemn others. Nevertheless, we have to face up to the issue of 'moral heresy', to which much attention has been given in recent years, particularly in connection with the Programme to Combat Racism. In our view, the concept of 'heresy' is not in practice a very helpful standpoint from which to consider racism. Certainly we recognize that some of the theories and beliefs advanced to justify racism may be heretical, but the discussion of racism must not be side-tracked into an academic discussion of what is or is not formal heresy. On the other hand, we recognize that orthodoxy and orthopraxy are intimately related. As we have already noted, Christian

doctrine cannot be divorced from its practical implications. All heretical teaching is likely to produce moral distortions of one sort or another.

Equally, behind every discriminative action, if accepted and justified as a Christian mode of behaviour, there lies some hidden heresy. But our main concern should not be to denounce groups or churches as morally heretical. Rather, we should be consistently attentive to possibly negative effects of certain beliefs and practices, and to help each other to discover and overcome them.

The concept of moral heresy, it seems to us, was originally intended to make a preacher's point. The legitimacy of this is hardly open to dispute. But endless complications and difficulties arise when it is transplanted into formal theological discourse, particularly in the context of the ecumenical movement, which has no constitutional claims on its member churches.

3. Church Discipline

From our understanding of discipleship we would be inclined rather to focus our attention on the discipline of the church. "If Being the Church" means "re-establishing community in situations of suffering", it means leading a disciplined life according to this criterion. "Disciplined life" means that all decisions and actions at all levels of church life are related to this central notion of discipleship. As such it does not imply rigidity and isolation but rather consistent flexibility and openness: not an openness towards all kinds of things, but towards people and communities of people (including other churches) in whose life suffering for the sake of freedom and reconciliation has somehow become constitutive. Only in the context of this disciplined life does the concept of unity take on meaning and substance. Only in the context of this disciplined life can the unity of the church be called a sign of the unity of mankind.

We are very much aware of the fact that in the course of church history church discipline has been organized accordingly to certain patterns and that in some churches it has become an important part of their life and structure. We would invite all churches, however, to consider whether some of these patterns of church discipline have not in fact moved away from the notion of discipleship that we are trying to spell out here. At this point, we would like to suggest two points:

a) In the first place we submit that the notion of church discipline has become too individualistic in many churches. It is the individual church member who is "disciplined". The process of repentance that we have been trying to describe, however, makes it difficult to maintain this emphasis. In sins like racism men and women are involved collectively and it is the same in the church. We cannot assume a clean church over against a possibly unclean individual. Discipline in this sense must mean helping one another relentlessly to become aware of the dimensions of evil and of our involvement in it. Discipline in this sense can only be judging if it is simultaneously self-judging and if it leads to common efforts at repentance-action. Of course these things have always been important in the understanding of church

discipline. But it seems to us that they take on new meaning in the light of the discoveries we have made.

Yet this is not the most radical reason why an individualistic conception of church-discipline seems to be inadequate. In the light of our understanding of discipleship as constant re-grouping around real suffering, discipline means a consistent effort to help each other to share constructively and hopefully in the suffering that is the result of sin.

b) In the second place we submit that in most churches the notion of church discipline has become too exclusive in the sense that it is automatically associated with excommunication. We are not prepared to eliminate this notion of excommunication entirely; we feel that it has its legitimate place in a church that seeks to lead a disciplined life. But neither are we prepared to use the notion of excommunication directly, for instance by saying that the church should excommunicate all racists. Our understanding of the sin of racism, as we have sought to describe it, and of the nature of discipleship in view of racism, clearly prohibits this.

Most important, however, is that our churches still lack the fruit of credibility that would grow out of a disciplined life around situations of real suffering; and we feel that responsible discussion of excommunication can only take place on the basis of such fruit. Until we have made some real progress on this road, we are not free, on the ground of racism either to excommunicate certain churches from the fellowship of churches.

On the whole, it is much more important to work for authenticity at the center than for a rigid definition of boundaries. Authenticity at the center implies solidarity in being the body of Christ in the world. That is not an uncritical solidarity that knows no limits; it is a solidarity that keeps defining and redefining itself from the center. In that process the so-called boundaries of the church might become visible to people simply by what the church is and does, rather than by what it says and defines.

4. Forms of Disciplined Life

Only in the context of this positive understanding of discipline can we say that the church should examine its own life relentlessly in order to ascertain and eliminate institutional racism in itself. Only in the context of this positive understanding of discipline can we try to avoid both the arrogant aloofness of those who feel that they are too important to get their hands soiled in the mundane struggle against racism as well as the self-righteous, sectarian attitude of those who believe that they alone are the Lord's true disciples because they march against racism in advance of the church. And only in the context of this positive understanding of discipline will submerged people and groups within the church be enabled to rise and take in hand their own responsibilities as members of the body of Christ.

What does this mean for the life of the Church?

We have given our attention to the following concerns:

4.1 Discipline in Worship and Sacraments

Firstly it appears that the Church needs to be based more decisively on "disciplined worship". This would imply that we seek a new discipline in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Through Baptism every person is made part of the Christian Community, and this inclusiveness of our corporate identity in Christ must be taken literally. In the same way the Eucharist is the celebration of oneness in Christ and it is rendered incredible where it is not lived out in a consistent and committed practice of solidarity between black and white, between races and sexes.

The disciplined life in the sacraments and the worship of God provokes rigorous prophetic preaching. Unrepentant racists need to be exhorted exhorted that for the health of their souls they are not welcome at the Lord's table until they truly repent. The leadership of the Church needs to be vigorous enough to eradicate preaching and teaching which conforms to personal and institutional racism, and to support preachers and teachers who work against racism. For indifference to racism in the Church is indifference to the worship and service of God.

At the same time our discipline of worship will have to be much more pastoral insofar as it seeks to draw into communion with Christ those who truly repent and are burdened with unacquitted guilt, hidden fears and loneliness. A disciplined worship will be worship which is unqualifiedly hospitable to all who seek Christ. Of course, each congregation has a definite character. But truly united worship will always include those who do not fit in. They are an indispensable sign of how radical the communication of God is. We ought to work hard to prevent totally homogeneous congregations, to secure worship which is truly hospitable to the wide diversity of Christian identity. So, as a consequence of disciplined worship, the Church discovers how deeply its prophetic and pastoral tasks are intertwined and how they flow together in the building up of the healing community in this world. The inclusiveness of the church will reveal itself in the integrity and comprehensiveness with which it denounces sin, gives new heart to the broken and disheartened, heals the depressed, and sets free the oppressed.

4.2 Disciplined Life in Education

The disciplined life in the Church not only expresses itself in the central activity of worship, in preaching and administration of the sacraments. The discovery of the pervasive and contaminating character of racism must lead us also to reflect on other dimensions of the churches' life. We would in particular like to mention some aspects in the areas of education and renewal.

The brief reference to church history forces us to conclude that the task of teaching in the Church will have to include the critical reassessment of the extent to which our perception of our history still reflects and perpetuates discrimination against minority groups. There is need to reevaluate the important contributions and insights for which many marginalized and rejected groups have struggled and suffered. In addition to this there is need to correct the often false ways in which history books and other theological textbooks present the stories of

these groups and movements. To relive the past by rediscovering the role of the Church of Christ from the viewpoint of the suffering church will help us greatly to see ourselves today in that self-scrutinizing and repentant manner of which we have tried to speak. This will help us both as teachers and as students of theology today to become aware of the on-going cultural, ethnocentric and linguistic presumptions which, in different ways, still reinforce racist features in our theology. Such a self-scrutinizing style of doing theology will lead us to seek ways of inter-cultural, inter-racial and thereby truly ecumenical confrontation and correction. It will also make it mandatory to seek a deeper understanding of the sociological, psychological, economic and other elements which need to be taken into account in order not only to assess fully the churches' involvement in racism and the mechanisms which enforce it but also to provoke changes with sufficient care and vigour.

Again, only on the basis of such a self-critical approach would we be entitled to attack prophetically the unjust features, economic, political and otherwise, of entrenched racism.

An obvious consequence of all this is the need to revise the curricula of education in schools and other institutions of learning. This not only relates to history books, but also to the literature we use in our worship services. Hymnbooks and liturgies need to be checked and new formulae suggested which take into account the experiences of churches and movements that are constantly being overlooked, distrusted or rejected. Disciplined life should be marked by the imagination and joy of discovering the experiences with Christ which such groups represent.

Another vital aspect of renewing educational efforts needs to be a new emphasis on enabling the marginalized to make full use of their potential. Provisions must be made to help these groups to defend and express themselves not in the spirit of benevolent remedial activity but in an attempt to share resources, insights and gifts which exist in the one Body of Christ and which must not be left to suffer lest the whole body suffer.

4.3 Disciplined Life in Renewal

The collective and pervasive sin of racism has led us to understand more fully that the discipline of renewal must constantly seek to meet the requirements of inclusiveness, mutual accountability and comprehensiveness. Honest attempts at active repentance will lead to a close combination of work and reflection, of witness and commitment. It will also penetrate the on-going evangelistic task of the churches. This is a formidable task because in many churches, the emphasis on evangelism tends to be separated from the insistence on social action and the radical transformation of society. But we affirm that conversion to God calls for a second conversion to the world, especially to those who are in suffering and pain.

The enormity of the problem of racism has perplexed and frustrated many and the struggle against it in its many different forms has exhausted many groups. Others have sunk back into resignations and apathy.

The quality of the discipline of the healing sacramental community of Christians will therefore be determined, particularly at the local level, by the sharing love, pastoral concern and prophetic solidarity in suffering which refuse to leave brothers and sisters to stand alone. The church must enfold them in its protective arms, encourage, correct and sustain them to return to and persist in the battle against racism.

CHAPTER V: CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION

In the light of the reflection set out in this paper we want to draw special attention to the programmes and activities in which various churches are already involved in their particular contexts. The suggestions listed below should be regarded neither as exhaustive nor as competing with those already put forward by various groups and agencies in the churches and the ecumenical movement.

The Church's task of fighting racism within its own ranks is concerned not only with the education of the clergy and laity but also involves conducting a relentless inquiry into the life of the church in order to identify and eliminate both institutional and personal racism. The call for discipleship and discipline within the church is implemented in the conversion of its own structures and of its theological methods and educational policies. For it is only by being authentic at the very centre of its ministry that the church can fulfil the prophetic role to which it is called in society at large.

1. EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL METHODS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

In the field of theology and education we are confronted with the following tasks:

a) To organize programmes to conscientize members of church and society to enable them to discover their direct and indirect support for racism at all levels in the past and in the present.

b) To conduct investigations into the curricula of schools at all levels, i.e. in primary, secondary and university education (particularly of mission-schools and theological seminaries) in order to discover their possible contribution to ethnocentric views and their lack of information on intercultural and inter-racial dialogue.

c) To revise textbooks, e.g. catechisms, hymns -and prayer- books, Bible-translations, books on the history of churches -and missions, descriptions of other faiths, with respect to their possible support of racial and cultural imperialism.

d) To inquire into the methodology of theological education especially with regard to communication between literary and oral cultures as mainly identical with the cultures of the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed.

e) To sponsor programmes of training for minority-groups to permit the maximal fulfilment of their educational potentials and for their basic recognition within the common life of the churches.

2. EXAMINATION OF CHURCH STRUCTURES

In living a disciplined life of unity and solidarity we are asked to be ready for changes in order to:

a) Be prepared to go where the victims of racism are, to become engaged with them in the struggle against oppression and in situations of crisis.

b) Help those who have been unconsciously ignored by, or deliberately discriminated against, to have access to real power in the decision-making bodies which control and deploy the human and material resources of the church.

c) Give support to indigenous churches which act as identity-groups for the social and spiritual survival of their members and for the preservation and re-awakening of their dignity as human beings and values of their communities.

d) Contribute to groups which are prepared to share in worship, fellowship and service in their respective multi-racial communities and so help to create the new atmosphere of mutual trust, healing and co-operation.

e) Help to create living liturgies in the context of racial tensions and encourage the inter-communication of liturgies from different geographical, cultural and denominational backgrounds.

f) Support solidarity with minority-churches by inviting them into local and national church-councils on the basis of Christian fellowship rather than of technical or statistical requirements.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STRUGGLE FOR A JUST SOCIETY

In our ministry to society we need to work in the following ways:

a) By exposing, through documentation and the mass-media, the interrelation between racism and international economic structures of exploitation and so disclosing factors which contribute to personal and institutional racism.

b) By supporting groups involved in the struggle against exploitation and oppression and by supporting their claim for access to equal power-sharing, education and employment.

c) By giving financial, legal and medical support to victims of oppression and assisting them by prayer and meditation so that they may be enabled to stand for themselves and to make their own decisions in their particular situations.

Appendix

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